

Full Metal Exosuits

The Crimson Dragon

Book One of the Full Metal Exosuits Trilogy



Chapter 21

*I looked back at all the
people I killed. I felt hollow
inside. What use was my
power if it could only
destroy?*

- Kaban Starik: Corvan Special Forces

Jaygo folded his arms as he studied the holographic diorama of the war and battlefields. It was infuriating that they had waited so long to get this information.

He gritted his teeth. Reading the numbers on a report was one thing, but seeing it displayed in front of him made Jaygo realize how dire their situation was. They were losing ground against the Corvan military. They had captured most of the western part of the Empire. In the six months they had spent quelling the rebellion, the Corvans had won every battle against them.

"This doesn't make any sense," Seth said as they reviewed the battle data, "We have both superior numbers and weapons technology, yet we're losing to them."

"Lynn cut us at the source," Jaygo said, "It's no surprise that we're struggling."

Seth shook his head, "But to lose every battle? Some of these battles were on home territory, with three times as many Iratian soldiers as Corvan ones."

Jaygo thought back to the night before, to the man who was using Ti. He didn't think it was possible, but it might explain the losses if Lynn had trained even a handful of people to use it.

"What we really need," Orlo said, "is a new way of inspiring our soldiers to fight. They look to us as heroes, but that doesn't seem to be enough."

"That's really something General Tomath has to worry about," Jaygo said, "not us. I'm more worried about how we can do better as a Company than the ones we have no control over."

"Most of the time, we're treated as a junk squad rather than a special forces unit," Jaled scoffed, "they might as well put us in one. All we ever seem to do is clean up after the other platoons."

“It’s Jaygo’s fault for that,” Ilek said, “since he’s the poster boy for the Empire, they don’t want to put their hero at risk, even though he’s more than capable.”

Jaygo clenched his fists in irritation; he knew they were right. His superiors were too afraid of letting him leave. He was the last sure line of defense for Atoli. Not to mention he was the face of the war. It seemed all Jaygo was good for was posing and making inspiring speeches. At this rate, it could well be another five years before Jaygo had an opportunity to search for Lynn again, let alone fight him.

“I’ll talk to General Tomath again,” Jaygo said, “and see if we can take on more serious duties, especially now that the Rebellion has been squashed. As it is now, we are being wasted.”

After they reviewed the varying tactics for improving the Company, they moved to the FME docking bay, where the soldiers proceeded to inspect their Full Metal Exosuits and perform various tests on them. Jaygo went over to his station to inspect his FME, the Axial.

The Axial stood a little over two meters tall. It looked similar to a set of armor that was painted crimson and white. The white helmet had a slanted red visor and guns on the sides near the cheeks. The chest piece was crimson at the top, where the chest was, and white to the waist. In the center of the chest piece was a ruby orb that served as the power source to the FME. The shoulders were pointed in a rhombus, with free-moving joints for full mobility. The arms and wrists were also white, with rockets attached to each forearm. The hands were crimson, and despite being completely made out of steel, could move with just as much mobility and sensitivity as a human hand. A power pack and several rifle magazines encompassed the waist. The legs were white and had boosters on the back, for flight. The feet were crimson and had rockets beneath them as well.

Attached to the back were an exhaust vent and another circular power supply pack. Eight flaps were attached near the bottom of the pack, which could move about freely. The pack was also used for rocket-powered flight.

A short young woman was underneath the Axial, welding part of the lower left leg.

“Riza, how’s the Axial coming along?” Jaygo asked her as he approached.

The young woman, Riza Bloodthawne, stopped welding and took off her glasses. She had mud-brown hair and eyes. Her face was covered with freckles and grease. She looked like a kid; though she was eighteen, she was shorter than Ceri. She wore a grease-stained jumpsuit, the arms of which were rolled back.

“Not too bad,” she replied, “I found a slight leak on the lower left leg, which is what I was just patching up, but otherwise, he’s in great condition.”

Jaygo smiled, “That’s good to hear; any new installments since yesterday?”

Riza shrugged, “No, but a new system will go into prototyping soon.”

“What will it be,” Jaygo asked, “a new weapon or electro mag shield?”

“It’s supposed to augment your reaction time to act more quickly. The Corvans have been fighting faster and stronger these past few months. We’re hoping to level the playing field. It’s potentially dangerous though, as it affects the nervous system in the brain. Which is why we haven’t moved to prototyping yet.”

“Any estimation on when it’ll be finished?” Jaygo asked.

Riza shook her head, “It’ll probably be a few weeks before the first prototype is built. The general does want the Axial to be that first prototype, though.”

Jaygo grinned; he was always the first one to test prototypes. The Empire liked to show off their technology, and its superiority, even if he never got a chance to use it most of the time, “Excellent. Well, I’ll keep my eye out for it then. What are you calling it?”

“We developers have been calling it the Alpha Gear, but that probably won’t stay its name when it’s seen battle.”

Jaygo put his arm on the Axial’s shoulder, “We’ve been through a lot together, the two of us,” He looked at Riza, “Make sure you take care of him.”

Riza snorted, “That’s my line, you dork. You’re the one ravaging this guy every time you go out to a battlefield. Pretty much every part of him has been replaced at one time or another.”

Jaygo smiled, “Your father made one in a million when he made

the Axial, Short Stuff. You're a lot like him." His smile faded, "He was a good friend and an excellent soldier. I couldn't have a better partner."

He saw that Riza was uncomfortable; she didn't like to hear about her father, even though Jaygo talked about him all of the time. Even though it had been three years, her father's death still affected all of them.

Jaygo thought about when he had last seen her father, Raitou. Lynn had killed him as well. It was a terrible battle. Raitou had protected them all as they fled and had died as a true hero. As a memento to him, Jaygo took up his FME. Every time he put it on, not only did he feel its power, but Raitou's as well.

Jaygo stood still momentarily, paying his old friend his respects. "Well, Short Stuff," he said, "I've got some business to attend to. Take care now; I'll be back later."

Riza took that as a cue to go back under the Axial to finish the repairs. She waved Jaygo goodbye and went back to welding.

"Stupid Jaygo talking about my stupid father," she muttered, "I'm ten times the engineer he was. Gonna get himself killed one of these days, and he'll only have himself to blame."

Jaygo ducked out of the FME bay. It was time for him to talk to his commanding officer about getting into the warzone again. He was tired of waiting around and looking for Lynn.

Major Prida would never let him leave Atoli as it was, so he knew he'd have to appeal to either Colonel Hughes or General Tomath. He also didn't want to get scolded for the night before, and he knew that Laura would give him an earful. He walked down the officer halls to Colonel Hughes's office. Major Laura Prida and Lieutenant Colonel Don Gioke were talking and laughing when Jaygo entered the office.

Don sat relaxed in his chair, feet on his desk. He had blonde hair and hazel eyes. He glanced at Jaygo as he entered.

"Sir," Jaygo saluted, "I'd like to speak with Colonel Hughes."

"Colonel Hughes is out of the office right now, Captain," Laura explained to Jaygo, "But if you need anything, let me know. I'm your direct commanding officer."

Jaygo rolled his eyes. Like he needed a reminder. "Let me get straight to the point. My men and I are tired of parading around like we're part of a circus. We want to see some action. I've come here to ask to be

moved to the battlefield.”

“Listen, Captain; we’ve gone over this before. I can’t let you get yourself killed on the battlefield. Besides, we’re still recovering from the rebellion.”

“That’s a load of bull Laura, and you know it,” Jaygo said, “You know I can take care of myself.”

“Well, you’ve not impressed me yet, Captain!” She said, “Sure, you may have amazing combat abilities, but your ability to lead is somewhat lacking. You nearly got killed by the rebellion, along with the rest of your Company. You paraded around in the air asking to get killed.”

“I had it under control.”

“And yesterday, I heard that you invaded a rebel hideout all on your own, looking for Lynn. Tell me, did you find anything useful?”

Jaygo gritted his teeth.

“I didn’t think so. For all you know, Jaygo, the rebellion could still be strong. Ichimaru may have only been one leader. There could be splinter cells.”

All of their leaders have been decimated,” Jaygo said, “even if there are some rebels left, they have neither the means nor the equipment to reorganize themselves.”

“Then why did you enter the Blind Eye Cantina? Wasn’t it to find the rebel’s supplier? Didn’t you believe that was Lynn Forsigth?”

Jaygo clicked his tongue, “Yes, but there can’t be that many more rebels. We’ve nearly taken out a quarter million of them.”

“You’re just assuming this,” Laura said, shaking her head, “You’re just trying to get to Lynn Forsigth. Or am I wrong?”

“It’s true; I was searching for information on Lynn. If you think I’m reckless, that’s fine. But I would never put my men at risk. If you’ve noticed, I’ve only lost four men when on the battlefield. And in those battles, those men only lost their lives to one man. Do you know who that man is?”

She remained silent.

“You know as well as I do that I’m the only chance we’ve got of stopping Lynn. I’ve fought him more than anyone else and sustained the least casualties. If you want me to end this war, you have to let me find him.”

Don butt in, “But you don’t understand Jaygo. You’ve fought him more than anyone else. Yet every single one of those times, he beat you. He didn’t just beat you; he humiliated you. My problem with putting you on the battlefield—and Colonel Hughes shares the same opinion that I do—is if you do find Lynn, you will lose. We’ve lost enough ground as it is. Lynn Forsigh has not been seen on the battlefield for half a year now, and he only seems to show up when you do. You want to know why we’ve kept you on the ground to snuff out the rebellion? It’s because we can keep holding off the Corvan Army while Lynn is away. He seems to think you are the only one worthy of fighting him, and maybe that’s true, but it’s his pride that is costing him his victory, not you.”

Jaygo struggled to come up with something to counter his reasoning, “If Lynn were gone, then this war would be over, and I’m the only one who can defeat him!”

“You and Lynn have both been gone these past few months,” Don said, “And yet, the war continues. The world doesn’t revolve around the two of you, you know?”

“Then, if I’m so unimportant, let me find him,” Jaygo said, “Don’t keep me locked up here. We can’t help anyone just sitting.”

Don sat up, his hands resting on his chin, “What are you going to do when you find him, huh, Jaygo?”

Jaygo opened his mouth, but Don held up his hand.

“Do you have some sort of strategy?” Don asked, “Any new power indicating that something will change? Every time you’ve fought him, every time, mind you, he kills someone close to you. First, it was Hiroshi; then it was Kanojo, then Raitou, and finally Tigo.”

Jaygo felt cold as he heard their names.

“Can’t you see?” Don said, “Lynn is toying with you, trying to make you so blinded by hate and grief that when the time comes that he chooses to get serious, you’ll be no threat whatsoever.”

Maybe it was because Jaygo had already realized it. Maybe it was because he had awoken from his hatred. But it felt like an ocean wave crashed down on him. He could see it now. Lynn had been eating away at him, making him too angry to think.

“Personally,” Don said, “I think it was a mistake for the previous Emperor to dress you up as some kind of hero. It doesn’t help the war; it

just makes our most powerful weapon our greatest liability. And we don't bring liabilities into the battlefield."

Even Laura remained silent as Don berated Jaygo. Jaygo could do nothing to respond. He thought back to his fights with Lynn. It was clear to him. Don was right. Lynn had never been at full strength. He always taunted him, egged him on. He was weak. Lynn was stronger.

Don continued, "The problem with all of this, though, is that if Lynn Forsigth rejoined the war effort, he could launch an assault on Atoli, and we would be helpless against him. The both of you are like warheads, with enough power to decimate countries. We've all seen what you can do."

Laura nodded. People had taken videos of what he did when he stopped the Rebellion.

"Now you know what the Colonel, the General, and I have to worry about," Don said, "We're trying to conduct a war here, and both sides have weapons of mass destruction just waiting to be deployed. If either army decided to, they could wipe out the other. It's a perfect stalemate, or so we'd like to believe."

"But how?" Laura asked, "How did they get so strong?"

Don smiled, "We have two legendary warriors here at play. On the one hand, we have the pupil of Roken Jiryuku, the Dragon of the East. And on the other hand, we have the son of Edaj Forsigth, the Tiger of the West. You know, Lynn was born here in Irati. When he found out his heritage, he took up the ways of his father, Singh Yacket."

Jaygo took a seat and felt chills run down his spine, "I didn't know that. Are you sure of it? The King of Corva, Singh Yacket, is Edaj Forsigth?"

Jaygo thought back to that confrontation in the Palace. It made so much sense, finally. No wonder Edaj was able to take him down so quickly. He must have been the one who had trained Lynn in Ti. He couldn't believe he had been so blind. He had always wondered where Lynn got his power.

It made Jaygo question everything. Did Singh, no, did Edaj blame Jaygo's grandfather for the Unifying War? Is that why Lynn killed his family? As a form of revenge?

He couldn't believe it. That meant when Edaj had left Lynn all

those years ago, he became king of Corva. But Edaj had fought beside his grandfather to unite Irati. Why would he turn on it? What could have happened for him to kill his mentor's family?

"Whoops," Don said, "Wasn't supposed to let you know about that. The Colonel will have my hide on his wall for that slip-up. But yes, Our network of spies is quite certain about this. Apparently, Edaj changed his name when he became king. Or, more accurately, he took up the name Edaj Forsigth in the Unifying War."

"That makes this even worse!" Jaygo shouted, "Lynn's father abandoned him and his mother when he was a child! He should hate Corva almost as much as I hate him!"

"And there's a chance that he does, Jaygo," Don said, "But family does strange things to people, as you well know. I know you've been told that up until six months ago, Lynn was leading the Corvan army, but that's not quite true. The truth is his father was. And you and I both know that for as strong as Lynn is, even he isn't quite as good as his father, just like you aren't quite as strong as your master."

"So what am I supposed to do?" Jaygo said, "Just wait? This just proves that the bounty was a feint, and that Lynn must have orchestrated the rebellion. This means that he's still working with the Corvans."

"Maybe," Don said, "But it doesn't matter. Because for now, you need to wait. And train as much as you can. Because as it is now, you are not strong enough to defend this country. And that should scare you, because, by the Pits, it scares me."

Jaygo walked out of the office, his hopes shattered. Don was right; he did need to become stronger. The question was how? No one there was strong enough to give him a real challenge, even Ben. He could hear Lynn's voice laughing at him in the background, taunting him.

They all had played into Edaj's plan. Even now, somewhere out there, he was plotting.

Jaygo punched the wall with his fist, "KUSO! Am I really that weak? Am I just a burden to everyone here?" He walked away in silence.

Chapter 22

*Their struggle tore apart
the land. My home was
reduced to ashes, my family
crushed. I stood still,
covered with the blood of
my family.*

- Herot Sengall: Iratian Citizen

Jaygo walked down a hallway back to where the Company was, his eyes downcast, his fists clenched. He paid no heed to anyone who walked by him. Before he entered the conference room, he hesitated.

He knew he couldn't face them like this. He hadn't gotten them released from Atoli. He didn't have the courage to tell them he was too weak for them to get in a real fight. He walked away from the door, unsure of where to go.

He thought about Lynn. His heart turned to ice. Lynn's laugh haunted him, mocked him. It stood over his family, over his mentor, Hiroshi, over his first love, Kanojo, over his comrade and partner, Raitou, and over Tigo.

Don was right. How could Jaygo have missed it? He was so weak. He was powerless to stop Lynn. How was he supposed to get stronger?

His thoughts were interrupted as someone grabbed his shoulder.

"Jaygo," Tyrn asked, "Are you okay?"

He turned to look at her. He saw the worry in her eyes. He couldn't bear to look at her. His eyes darted to the ground.

"I'm fine. Nothing for you to worry about."

"Don't give me that crap," Tyrn said, "Don't shut yourself off. Not again."

Jaygo took her arm off of his shoulder, though he kept holding her hand and looked at her, "That's not the problem. I just learned the truth. And that can be really hard to hear sometimes."

Tyrn grabbed Jaygo's other hand with hers, "Did Laura rip into you again? She can be a pain."

"No, I can handle whatever she throws at me," Jaygo chuckled, "No, I just learned what the Colonel and the General really think of me."

"And what's that?"

He looked into her eyes, “That I’m weak. That to them, I’m no more than a liability to this country. And if he so chooses, Lynn could not only kill me, but everyone else as well.”

“Well, you know that’s not true,” she said.

Jaygo chuckled, shaking his head, “Do I? No, I know what he said was the truth.”

He let his fingers slip away from hers, “I struggle so hard! Every day. And yet, Lynn’s always one step ahead of me!” He struggled to keep his voice level, “Whenever I think of him, all I feel is hate! I can’t sleep at night. All I hear is his mocking laughter, and I watch him take everything away from me!”

“Jaygo...”

He grabbed her shoulders, “How do you do it?”

She was startled, her eyes searching his, “How do I do what?”

“You told me your parents died in the invasion, same as mine. But when I see you, you’re always strong, always ready to fight. You never give up.”

Tyrn sighed and pulled her arms around Jaygo in a soft embrace, “I think of them as I knew them, kind, gentle, loving. It helps me remember that I’m still their daughter. And I know I have people who care about me, who look out for me.”

Jaygo wrapped his arms around her, accepting her hug, “It’s so hard not to hate. I can’t think of anything else.”

“I don’t hate the man who killed my parents,” Tyrn said in a whisper, “I’m sad when I think about him. I know that he was just a soldier, following orders. At first, I did hate him. I wanted nothing more than to kill them. But then I remembered, my parents wouldn’t have wanted that.”

“I want to...” Jaygo struggled, “to remove myself of this hate, but I can’t. He’s there, always in my mind. I don’t know if I can be like you.” He got close to her and whispered in her ear, “But I’ll try my best.”

“And I’ll be here to help.”

They held each other for a few moments before letting go.

Jaygo looked at Tyrn and smiled, “Thank you.”

She smiled back, “It’s no problem. I’m glad that you’re letting me be there for you.” She nodded behind her, “We should probably head

back, though. The others will want to hear what Don told you.”

Jaygo nodded, and they walked back together. Everything always seemed easier when Tyrn was around. He didn’t know what he would do without her.

*I stood beneath the
shadows of two giants.
Their power overwhelming,
their battle world-
shattering.*

- Lagneb Gerit: Corvan Civilian

The days passed, and Jaygo trained, both in body and mind. Yet he could still feel the gap between him and Lynn. It frustrated him, but it was in those moments of frustration that he began to make breakthroughs. By the end of the week, Lynn seemed to be an afterthought. Tyrn was helping Jaygo discover who he was without Lynn.

He browsed through his wardrobe. His closet had little variety, mostly military uniforms, tank tops, and gym shorts. After a long, hard week, he finally had an opportunity to go on a date with Tyrn. He was nervous. His stomach kept flipping over and over, and he kept pacing around his room, thinking about what to say and do. After a few minutes of debate, he settled on a tan jacket, with sleeves rolled up, a long-sleeved black undershirt, and a pair of black slacks.

He reviewed the notes he had prepared for the date, having written several contingency plans. He had them memorized. By the time he had finished getting ready, there was still an hour until their date.

Jaygo paced up and down his apartment. He hadn't been this nervous since he last fought Lynn. He couldn't remember when his last date was. Three years ago, maybe longer?

Fifteen till, he shot down a glass of water before jumping onto his hoverbike, leaving his front door wide open. As he got to Tyrn's place, his mind was in a frenzy. It had only taken five minutes to get there.

Kuso! He thought traffic was going to be worse. Now what was he supposed to do? She probably could see him from her window and wondered why he was here so early. He circled the block to kill time. He felt a little sick to his stomach.

After minutes of running around in circles, he decided to park.

He struggled to get off his bike; his arms and legs were stiff. His foot caught on the seat, and he fell face forward on the ground. He got back up and dusted himself off.

He hoped no one saw that. He walked up to Tyrn's door and struggled for a minute before he summoned the nerve to ring the doorbell. He had to wait only a few seconds before Tyrn opened the door.

She was stunning. She wore a dazzling crimson dress that seemed to dance in the slow breeze. Her hair was down and styled into waves. Her sky-blue eyes had never seemed brighter. Jaygo couldn't keep his eyes off her.

"Are you ready to go?" he asked, awed.

Tyrn smiled, "Yep. It's been forever since I went dancing. This will be so much fun."

"I thought you were breathtaking before," Jaygo said, "but I think you just might cause me to have a heart attack."

Tyrn's face was almost as red as her dress, "Thank you," she spluttered, "You look great, too."

Before jumping onto the hovercycle, however, Tyrn stopped Jaygo, "Wait a second."

Jaygo was startled, hoping that he hadn't done anything wrong, "What? Is there something wrong?"

Tyrn grabbed his collar and unbuttoned the top button on his jacket, "Much better; you just looked so uptight."

Jaygo blushed and straightened his coat, "Well, we better get going," he said as he helped Tyrn onto her seat.

"How's your evening been?" Jaygo asked as they flew through the sky.

"What?" Tyrn shouted back, unable to hear.

Jaygo just shrugged his shoulders and kept flying. Once they had reached the dance hall, he asked again, "How was your evening?"

"Oh. It was fine. But it seems like tonight will be a lot of fun," she grinned up at him.

He grinned back, holding her arm, "That's for sure. With me around, there's never a dull moment."

"That's for sure," Tyrn muttered under her breath.

As they walked into the dance hall arm in arm, a band performed a soft, slow love song, and couples everywhere were dancing across the floor.

"May I?" Jaygo asked as he grabbed her hand.

Tyrn curtsayed, “You may.”

They moved across the floor, dancing slowly. Their movements were fluid, their steps perfect. “Where’d you learn to dance?” Tyrn asked as he twirled Tyrn around.

Jaygo smiled mischievously, “Honestly?

“Yes.”

“Well,” Jaygo said as he pulled her down in a dip, “my master had me practice steps for fighting positions. I just adapted those here.”

He saw the stunned look on her face, “Really? That’s incredible!”

Jaygo shrugged, “Well, you know, dancing isn’t too different from fighting, and this is slow enough for me to keep up.”

Tyrn shook her head. Jaygo hoped she didn’t think he just undermined her passion.

Jaygo kept dancing with Tyrn, flowing through the stage, hoping that Tyrn was buying his crap. He didn’t remember the last time he danced. It was good that he watched a couple of videos before their date.

As the night progressed, they got to know more about each other. They were outperforming all of the other dancers. As they glided across the floor, the night grew late.

“I don’t remember when I had this much fun,” Tyrn said breathlessly, her face glistening with sweat.

“I don’t know if I’ve *ever* had this much fun,” Jaygo replied. He wasn’t tired at all.

As the band finished their song, the lead singer grabbed the microphone.

“We’d like to thank all the people out there who came and supported us tonight. It seems like everyone had a good time,” the crowd cheered in agreement. “This’ll be our last song tonight, and we’d like to spotlight a couple that has totally brought their A-game to the table.”

A spotlight shone on Tyrn and Jaygo, “Let’s give these good people a round of applause.” The crowd clapped and cheered again. “Let’s see if you guys can keep up with them.”

Jaygo and Tyrn looked at each other, wide grins across their faces. The band began playing. They just shrugged their shoulders and danced. The crowd watched in amazement at the speed and enthusiasm of their movements. As the song progressed, their moves got more and more

complicated. When it hit the chorus, only Jaygo and Tyrn remained dancing. The entire crowd was shouting along with the lyrics, cheering the two of them on. The tempo increased with each note, and their flurry of dance moves did too. As the end of the song approached, Jaygo threw Tyrn into the air, catching her in a dip. The crowd broke into a roar of applause.

“What great sports they are!” the lead singer shouted, “Let’s give them one more round of applause.” The crowd happily went along, “And what would you know, folks! That’s Captain Jaygo Yen Kale and Lieutenant Tyrn Ridner. They’re real heroes!”

The people in the crowd were stunned. The yellow journalism the Empire promoted essentially made them celebrities. Everyone clamored around them.

“I think that’s our cue to leave!” Jaygo exclaimed as he rushed out of the dance hall, pulling Tyrn with him.

As they escaped the crowd, they laughed.

“That was so much fun!” Tyrn said, “I didn’t know I was popular among them as well.”

“Are you kidding me?” Jaygo asked, “They love you more than me.”

“I’m glad we got out of there before we were hounded by them,” Tyrn sighed.

“Yeah, it’s late enough as it is,” Jaygo said, checking his watch. “It’s past 1:30.”

“Really?” Tyrn said, “It felt like we hardly spent any time in there at all.”

“Time really flies when you have someone special to spend it with,” Jaygo said, shrugging.

The sky broke with thunder, and it sprinkled on them. Tyrn laughed again.

“Great!” Tyrn said, “I’m glad it’s spring. This is nice.”

Jaygo scratched his head, “Yeah, but now we’re going to get drenched as we go home.”

Tyrn punched his shoulder, “Nothing that Captain Jaygo Yen Kale can’t handle, though, right?”

Jaygo grinned, “For sure. I was more worried about you.”

Tyrn threw her hands up in the air, “No need to worry about me; I’m great! In fact, I feel more than great! I feel spectacular!”

Jaygo chuckled, “Well, regardless of the rain, we should probably head home.”

The rain came down hard as they flew in the air on Jaygo’s hovercycle.

Jaygo could hardly see. He stopped in the middle of the air as he tried to get his bearings.

“My GPS lost connection. Give me a second while I try to figure out where we are,” Jaygo told Tyrn, “I can’t even tell what street we are hovering over.”

Tyrn looked around at the dark buildings. “I think we’re in the Azon district. It’s southwest of my house.”

“I think we’re in Bidol,” Jaygo said, “Which would put us south, right? Sorry for getting us lost.”

You’re fine,” Tyrn said, “I’m just worried about the rain. It’s really starting to come down.”

Jaygo reached down near his left leg and opened a compartment. He pulled out a small antenna and attached it to the front of his cycle.

“This should boost the signal. Just give it a moment to boot up. In the meantime, I guess we should just wait.”

Tyrn pulled her body closer to Jaygo’s, “You know, Jaygo. I think this is the happiest I’ve ever seen you. You really enjoyed tonight, didn’t you?”

Jaygo looked back at her and smiled, “That’s for sure. I don’t remember the last time I smiled for real.”

Tyrn smiled back at him, “You should do it more. It suits you.”

“Yeah,” Jaygo’s smile slowly faded, “It’s just that I haven’t had much to smile about.”

Tyrn hugged Jaygo tighter, “I know, but you can rest assured that I’ll have your back.”

“Thanks, Tyrn,” Jaygo said, his smile returning, “I really appreciate it. Not just for tonight, for all your help these past few days.”

“You know Jaygo; it’s not just me who is praying for you to succeed. Seth, Jaled, Ben, all of them care about you. And whatever problems you may be facing, we are here for you, no matter what. You

don't have to face him alone."

Jaygo pondered about that for a moment, unable to respond. The GPS beeped back to life.

"It's done," he said, pulling his eyes forward, "It seems both of us were wrong. We actually already passed your place. We're in the Liple district. If we go directly east, we should make it back in a few minutes."

As they finally reached Tyrn's place, the rain let up, dying out in a slow drizzle. As Jaygo walked up to the door, Tyrn stopped.

She held one arm awkwardly and dropped her gaze to the ground, "Thanks for the amazing night, Jaygo. We definitely need to do something like this again."

Jaygo put one arm behind his head, "That's for sure. How about the same time next week?"

"Sounds like a date," she said, grinning up at him.

Jaygo dropped his arms and grabbed Tyrn's hands, "Hey, I just want to thank you for all your help. I know I'm not the easiest person to work with, but it means a lot."

Tyrn stared into his warm brown eyes, "I don't mind. You're not just my partner, you know. You really mean a lot to me."

Jaygo gazed into Tyrn's bright blue eyes, "You mean a lot to me, too, Tyrn." He closed the distance between their two bodies.

Tyrn closed her eyes. Jaygo leaned in, his heart pounding, his cheeks burning.

Jaygo stopped, his lips right in front of Tyrn's. He could feel her warm breath. She leaned further, her lips brushing his.

A horrendous noise split them apart. Jaygo looked up as a giant shadow was cast over them.

He blinked. It wasn't possible.

The fragments of the electromagnetic barrier surrounding the city fizzled out, sending sparks down below.

Directly above, a Corvan FME carrier bigger than he had ever seen loomed down on them. Flashes of light, followed by descending black dots, filled the sky.

Enemy units were in the city.

Jaygo had been distracted. He should have listened to his instincts. He knew that Lynn was up to something. And now millions were at risk

because he focused on his own well-being.

Tyrn squeezed his arm, “Jaygo.”

Jaygo looked down at her. He didn’t know what to do. He couldn’t protect anyone, not like this.

Both of their phones started ringing.

Jaygo shook his head as he answered his.

“Captain,” General Tomath said, with shock in his voice, “Do you see this?”

“General, what’s going on?”

There was a pause, “We need you here now. It seems the war has been brought back to Atoli.”

Chapter 24

*The sky rained down blood
upon us. My friends, my
comrades... They're all
dead.*

- Opus Sarev: Corvan Soldier

Jaygo and Tyrn rushed into the Atoli compound, their clothes still dripping wet. General Tomath was waiting for them.

"Captain, Lieutenant, thank you for getting here so quickly," General Tomath said, "It seems that you were right, Captain."

Jaygo looked around the dark corridor, "Are we the first soldiers here?"

"Yes, but all other stationed officers have been summoned as well," the General said.

"How many soldiers do we have on the base?" Tyrn asked.

General Tomath ran his hand through his hair, "three thousand, consisting only of Colonel Hughes's brigade."

"Those dropships," Tyrn said, "Do you know how many Corvans there are?"

"At least ten thousand," General Tomath said, looking at the ground in bitterness.

"The response team has been woken up, right?" Jaygo asked, "We have to get out there right away. Which company is on call?"

"Captain Mado's company is the only one out there right now," General Tomath said, "But we've alerted the others."

Jaygo clenched his fists and dropped his gaze. Captain Glen Mado was a good woman and a great soldier. However, she stood no chance out there alone.

Jaygo started running down the hall, "It'll only be a few minutes before the enemy forces overrun her!"

"Wait!" Tomath called after him, "Come back! We need to strategize first. You'll be of no help to Glen if you rush out without a plan. Get dressed and meet me in the briefing room."

Jaygo hesitated before nodding, "Understood. C'mon Tyrn, let's go."

"Right," she said.

They went to their company barracks and dressed in the skin-tight underlayer worn beneath their FMEs. They hurried back to the briefing room. They were the only ones there.

Where are they? Jaygo thought as he paced up and down the room.

General Tomath burst into the room with Colonel Hughes, who looked like he had just woken up.

“Jaygo, Tyrn, I’m glad to see you two,” he huffed, trying to catch his breath, “Don, Laura, Jin, Yuri, and Rika will join us shortly.”

“What about the Captains?” Jaygo asked, “Are they coming as well?”

“I sent them to their companies,” Tomath said, “to back up Glen. We can’t wait any longer, or they’ll take the city. We’ve already started receiving casualty reports.”

Jaygo slammed his fist on a nearby table, “I should be out there with them! What am I doing here?”

“Calm down, Jaygo. We need you here. Your company will be needed for an assault on the carriers. The rest of the companies were sent out to defend the city,” General Tomath explained.

Jaygo stopped, his protest dying out in his throat. He knew it would do no good to argue with the General. He would just have to wait until the others arrived. He tried not to think of his comrades dying out in the field. He folded his arms, leaned against a wall near Tyrn, and looked at her. She stared back at him, her brows furrowed, her eyes alight with panic. It was a crazy way to end a date.

One by one, the lieutenant colonels and majors trickled in. As Laura saw Jaygo, she offered her protest, “What’s he doing here? He should be out there fighting!”

Lieutenant Colonel Gioke cut in front of her before Laura could hit Jaygo, “Now, now, Laura. I’m sure the General knows best. We should just take our seats. I know it’s hard to stay amiable at 0230.”

Laura grumbled and took her seat. Jaygo narrowed his eyes at her; it seemed like she was more irritable than usual.

Jerk, he thought as Laura glared at him.

General Tomath stood at the front of the room and spoke, “Okay, Soldiers, listen up. At 0200 hours, our radar technicians picked up a disturbance right outside the Atoli province, coming in from the

southwest. The company on patrol, Captain Mado's company, reported ten dropships appearing out of the sky, dropping roughly ten thousand enemy FMEs on the field. At this point, it is unknown if there are more dropships, but our reports indicate that the enemy is focusing on a full frontal assault, with the attack solely coming from the southwest.

"Captain Mado said the enemy units broke into a two-brigade formation. The first brigade cut off the river; the second brigade assaulted the electromagnetic barricade around the city. As I'm sure you're all aware, they've managed to break through. Captain Mado will not hold them long, and we must ensure they do not advance further in their attack.

"Since we are limited to only one brigade, we will break off into battalions, with Lieutenant Colonel Gioke leading a two thousand manned battalion to attack the enemy's second brigade. Major Kenda, Major Sori, you will help form this battalion with Major Prida's forces."

Yuri, Kenda, Rika, and Sori nodded and started whispering amongst themselves.

"The captains you manage have already been sent out to the field with this knowledge. You'll be outnumbered two to one here, so take advantage of your surroundings. Remember, this is our land.

"As for you, Major Sykes, you'll take your battalion and captains to the enemy's first brigade. If they follow the river, it'll lead them straight through the heart of the city. It is imperative that you take them head-on. I know you're outnumbered five to one here, but I can't afford to let even one unit escape further into the city."

Jin Sykes gulped. Jaygo shook his head; it was suicide. Even though Jin was regarded as the most experienced Major, he had little hope of holding them off.

General Tomath looked at Jaygo, "You think you can handle it, son?"

Jaygo looked at Tyrn, sweat dripped down her face, then looked back at the General, "We'll be fine, General. My men are more than capable."

General Tomath saluted them, "Excellent. Kothspeed, Captain, you're going to need it."

Everyone in the room saluted back, "Thank you, General," Jaygo replied as he and Tyrn exited the room, quickly moving down the hall to

the FME Bay.

“Everyone will already be waiting for us outside, so I’ll see you soon, Tyrn,” Jaygo said as they entered the bay.

“Right,” Tyrn responded. She hesitated before turning to go to her FME, “Jaygo, be careful out there.”

Jaygo turned his back and waved his arm at her, “You know I will be.”

As he reached the Axial, he shouted, “Axial, open! Authorization 560206.”

The Axial’s internal computer responded in a soft electronic female voice that sounded annoyingly similar to Riza’s, “Authorization accepted, opening.” The front of the Axial transformed, opening up to allow Jaygo to fit inside. As he did so, the Axial closed again.

The heads-up display inside the visor roared to life, displaying Jaygo’s vitals, the amount of power left in the Axial, and the general condition of the various parts of the suits. A twenty-second diagnostic checked each part, released the vents, and checked the rockets and the weapon’s system. The Axial’s internal computer system stated, “All systems are online.”

Jaygo crouched in the Axial, and the rockets on the feet and legs roared to life. “Go!” he shouted, and the Axial rocketed into the night sky.

He flew high into the sky, above the clouds, flying in loops while performing a series of punches and kicks to ensure the Axial was loose. He released the rockets and plummeted downward. Right before he crashed into the ground, he twisted in the air, activating the rockets, and landed softly.

Everything was running smoothly. He had been a little worried since the last battle with the rebellion. It seemed that Riza had fixed everything.

Tyrn dropped down next to him in her FME, the Royal, a few moments later.

“All systems are functioning, and I’m ready to go,” she responded through her comms, “Let’s get this show on the road.”

“Right,” he acknowledged, “Leviathan Company, this is Captain Kale. Please respond.”

One by one, all of the soldiers responded.

“This’ll be a nasty one, I reckon,” Seth voiced, excited. “It’s been far too long since I’ve had any real fun.”

“Fun for you, maybe,” Jaled chided, “I’ll have to cover your ahsho the entire night to prevent you from killing yourself.”

“I heard the odds, Jaygo,” Mishti interjected, “five to one. Do you think we stand a chance?”

“We’ll be fine,” he replied, “Where is everyone? Lieutenant Ridner and I will come join you.”

“We’re about a mile south of the base,” Ilek answered, “but wouldn’t you rather meet us near the battlefield? Captain Mado is running out of time.”

Jaygo and Tyrn took off toward them, “No, I’d rather we all group up first. Besides, our company won’t even be interacting with hers. We’re headed your way.”

“What are our orders, Jaygo?” Orlo asked.

“We’re joining Major Sykes’s division,” he said, “I’d like to keep his casualties down. So I’ll be a diversion.”

“Who do you think drew the shorter stick,” Bors asked, “us or Major Sykes’s battalion?”

“It doesn’t matter either way,” Roso cut in, “We’re screwed regardless.”

Jaygo jumped in, “What kind of talk is that? We’re the cream of the crop. The Corvans better be ready for us, because we’ll give them more than just a fair share of trouble.”

Jaygo and Tyrn slow down and descend, “Anyway, get ready to go.” They landed on the ground, “We’re here.”

Jaygo looked at the Leviathan Company and smiled with pride. He was confident in their abilities, despite what Roso had said. He knew that they could handle themselves. Of course, he would do the heavy hitting, making sure no one died.

“Leviathans,” Jaygo said, “Too long have we waited on the sidelines. They’ve forgotten how strong we are!” He paused and walked down the lines between the units, “We shall show them what a mistake this was. Each one of you is worth five hundred of them, and by the time this battle is over, all shall know the fury of the Leviathan Company.”

The soldiers saluted him in unison. Tensions were high. There was no cheering or applause. Every one knew the dangers involved.

“Move Out!” Jaygo commanded as everyone rocketed into the air.

*He moved like lightning;
his body was surrounded
by a power I had never
seen. It was like magic.*

- Bors Grund: Iratian Sergeant

Jaygo and the Leviathan Company watched as Major Sykes engaged the enemy in battle in the streets while they waited under cover of a nearby building. Bullet fire and explosions lit up the night. Screams littered the streets as people fled the destroyed buildings, only to be killed by a stray bullet.

It was a gruesome display. Dead and injured people littered the streets. The Corvans callously stepped over the bodies. The blood on the streets mixed with the water from the rain and reflected the light of the fires.

Jaygo cursed under his breath. He'd never forgive Lynn for this. West Atoli was mostly civilian. They carted as many people to safety as they could, but it wasn't enough.

He watched as a group of civilians was mowed down by a Corvan minigun. Shock was forever frozen on their faces as they were blasted to the ground.

Sykes's company wasn't doing well. The Corvans were pushing them back.

Jaygo approached Orlo, who had a 3D map of the city pulled up.

"Orlo," Jaygo asked, his voice urgent, "How does it look?"

Orlo shook his head, "Not very good, I'm afraid. Fortunately, we have these high rises, but it'll be hard to find a tactical advantage without engaging the enemy head-on. Our snipers are too outnumbered, and the vantage points are too high. I'll send you the layout of the battlefield."

A detailed map of the land around them popped up in Jaygo's HUD. The Company was indicated by red dots, Sykes' battalion by yellow dots, and the Corvans by green dots. A small red circle surrounded the building where they stood.

"As you can see here," Orlo explained, "We hold no advantage by staying here. The area is level, and most of the streets are covered by paths above. I recommend that we keep our marksmen here on the fourth floor

of this building to scout leaders while the rest of us flank them from behind. That'll give us a short advantage."

Jaygo nodded, "Excellent work, Sergeant. You've become quite the strategist since you joined this Company."

Orlo shrugged, "I worked for my father's architecture firm before joining the army. I know the city. Seeing the area is just a part of who I am."

"Keep up the good work. I want you to stay here with Lieutenant Ridner and Sergeant Dorifu," Jaygo directed, "You three will be our driving force. Stay behind and shoot their leaders."

Tyrn shouted in protest, "You can't mean to keep me off the battlefield? You need me to have your back!"

Jaygo sighed; he knew this was coming, "Listen, Tyrn, you're tired. We were both already up when we received the call to come out here. I can't let you onto the battlefield if you're tired. Besides, your specialty is marksmanship. I'm relying on you to scope out those officers. This is an order, do you understand?"

Tyrn's cut her protest short, "Yes, sir."

Jaygo nodded, "Thanks, I know this may be hard for you to obey, but I'll really be relying on you."

Tyrn shook her head. Jaygo sighed in relief as she primed her rifle. She wasn't going to fight this.

"Jaygo, just promise me you'll be careful," she said.

"Of course," Jaygo nodded.

They shared one last gaze before Jaygo moved on.

Jaygo addressed Ilek next, "Ilek, I need you to use your Enterprise FME to take down the officers as well. There will be a number of them that our marksmen won't be able to target."

Ilek nodded, as bright as ever, "They won't know what hit them."

"Mishti, I need you to stay back to scan the Corvan officers' FMEs for weaknesses. Relay any information you receive to Ilek."

Mishti stood still for a moment.

Jaygo, sensing what she was thinking, added, "As long as you keep your head down, feel free to grab any tech that you may want to study out there on the field."

"Excellent," she said.

“Seth, Jaled, Roso,” he commanded, “I want you to come with me to distract the enemy. Our FMEs pack the heaviest punch, so we want to draw their fire. I’ll do my best to draw everyone to me, but I’ll also need your help. We can affect the most units if we catch them off guard.”

The three nodded to Jaygo in response. They were expecting this. All three of their FMEs had special modifications allowing them to attack with far greater power than an average FME.

“Shado, Bors, and Ben, I want you to partner with Sykes to take down the infantry units. See if you can get a platoon under your control to help you. Even though the four of us will be drawing their fire, you three will be the true force that stops this assault.”

Ben folded his arms underneath his chest, “The hawks look to the Eagle to fly, but their prey escapes them. None escapes from the Eagle’s claws.”

Shado just scoffed at Ben in response. Bors grinned at Ben’s inspiring words.

“Justice will prevail today, my friends,” he said as he posed, “We three shall be the beacon that leads these men into victory.”

Jaygo just rolled his eyes at Bors. Always with the theatrics.

“Alright, men,” Jaygo commanded through the comms, “Let’s move out. For the Empire!”

Jaygo, Seth, Jaled, and Roso charged onto the battlefield, catching the Corvan soldiers off guard. They tore through the enemy units with their rifles and their phase swords, not hesitating. Tyrn and the other marksmen shot down the Corvan scout drones flying overhead.

Seth, with his heavy weaponry, mowed down anyone in his way. After firing his minigun, he launched a grenade at the enemy, ensuring their death. He haphazardly jumped into enemy units, relying on his heavy armor to protect him. He laughed as he shot down his enemies.

Jaled fought through the Corvan ranks, making sure Seth was well protected.

“Fool boy is going to get himself killed,” he said as he moved closer to Seth.

Four units attacked Seth from behind, where he was unguarded. Jaled jumped in at the last moment, cutting down the four units with a

single slash of his phase sword. More units circled Seth and Jaygo, who were now circling each other back to back.

“How is it,” Jaled demanded, “that I’m the one who always has to save your sorry skin?”

Seth just laughed, “C’mon, old man, you know I can’t be taken down by the likes of these.”

Jaled shook his head, “Your airheaded ignorance will get you killed one of these days.”

Seth grinned, “That’s a day I look forward to.”

Seth switched to his side-arm sword attachment as he attacked the enemies head-on. Jaled followed suit, attacking the soldiers with his phase sword. They moved in a perimeter, switching between using their guns and swords.

Roso plowed through the Corvans, relying on the EMPs equipped to his FME. Dozens of units dropped as the EMP disabled their units. Roso, out of his duty of being a chaplain, avoided killing when he could, but he was forced to use his rifle at times. The electromagnetic shield that Mishti made for his FME protected him from most attacks. The enemy gathered around him as they realized they couldn’t take him down. Jaygo’s plan was working.

“Koth, lend me your strength,” he said as he unleashed the claws out of his Panther FME.

Mishti used her Chameleon FME to her advantage as she scoured the battlefield for new tech. As she did that, she scanned for enemy weaknesses, directing Tyr, Orlo, Ceri, and Ilek where to attack.

She smirked as her scanners picked up unidentified parts. There was a new part installed near the base of each Corvan FME. Could it have been a new system? She longed to take it apart.

“I’m sending your targets now,” she said, relaying her information to Tyrn, Orlo, and Ceri, “Try not to damage the FMEs too much. I’d like to take them apart.”

Ceri, Orlo, and Tyrn shot at the officers. Tyrn took the longest shots, hitting impossible targets. She used a standard sniper rifle with no

extra attachments; she didn't need them. The accuracy of her gun would not increase, and because of the lack of extras, she only took milliseconds between reloading. Each FME she hit was taken down with a headshot in the weak spot of the visor.

Ceri was the next best marksman due to a special rifle railgun that Mishti had developed for her. She didn't need exceptional aim, because each time she fired, half the enemy FME would be torn apart by the force of the blast. The railgun had a heavy recoil, though, and it took six seconds to recharge between shots.

Orlo was the third-best marksman in the Company; however, he paled in comparison to Ceri and Tyrn. His range was much shorter than the others, and he spent over a second between shots. Yet his work was still excellent. To compensate for his lack of skill, Orlo targeted the officers closest to him, knowing that Ceri and Tyrn could take out the rest.

With their skills combined, not a single shot they fired missed.

As the snipers took down the officers, Ilek weaved between the enemy FMEs until he reached an officer. Completely cloaked by his retro-reflective panels, he killed them instantly with the weak points Mishti had divulged to him.

Despite his normally jovial attitude, He did not smile or joke as he worked, but held no regrets as he killed. His hands were clean of the blood spilled in the war. Some would call his fighting dirty. They would say he was nothing short of an assassin. He didn't care. Protecting the people was more important than honor.

As Ilek assassinated the Corvan officers, Sykes directed Ben, Shado, and Bors to lead the attacks, leaving them with skilled platoons. Sykes had never seen such amazing soldiers before. They were at an entirely different skill level than his soldiers.

Not only were they able to destroy the Corvans easily, but they also managed to keep the Corvans' focus on them, allowing civilians time to seek shelter. The number of soldiers he lost dropped with each second that passed.

The Corvans started focusing entirely on the Company.

Sykes thought the Leviathan Company had been just talk, but they

were a supreme fighting force. Their individual skill dwarfed that of most of his soldiers. And it showed. He could take down Corvan FMEs easier as they focused on the Company.

With her twin phase swords, Shado slashed through the enemy FMEs, her Nightmare FME gleaming blood-red in the moonlight. The men she killed looked at her with both awe and terror, dying before they hit the ground.

Shado felt nothing as she cut, except the pain of the drills she had been forced to do over and over again to obtain her level of skill.

“Do it right!” her father growled as he kicked Shado in the ribs. This time, he might have broken one. That made it four, then.

She bit back the blood in her mouth and glared at her father.

He sneered down at her, “If you applied that much hatred to what you’re supposed to be doing, you wouldn’t be useless.”

Shado stood back up, ignoring the pain in her ribs. It was no use crying. And her father blocked every attempt on his life.

“If you’re going to be an assassin,” her father said, stepping back, “you must be unnoticed. Now do it again!”

Shado wiped her face as she held the invisible wire and toxin. She hurried back to the edge of the skyscraper.

Police sirens and shouts of terror fell on deaf ears. All she could see was her next target.

Distance: 6209 meters at a 10.62-degree angle. Shado shook her head. No, 6208.741 meters at an 11.104-degree angle. She couldn’t mess up this time.

She tossed the toxin-laden wire down to her target. The wire bounced down in front of him before falling into his mouth with the toxin attached.

She pulled back the wire as the criminals below blew her target away with a shotgun blast.

As she pulled the wire back, her father looked at her. His disdain seemed to have lessened.

“That is how you hide a kill,” he said, walking away from her, “I don’t want to see such sloppiness again.”

Death, that’s all she had learned. The sole reason she was created

was to kill. So why, why couldn't she kill him?

"Come Shado," her father said, snapping his fingers, "Enough practice. Now we must move on to your real target."

She growled as one of her swords stuck to an enemy's armor.

"I hate getting these swords dirty," she moaned as she ruthlessly pulled it out of him, his screams deaf to her ears.

Hundreds of corpses surrounded her, none of them stood a chance against her. As she cleared a part of the battlefield, she removed a cloth from her FME and cleaned her swords.

On the other side of the battlefield, Ben directed a platoon Sykes assigned him. He glanced at the men he was leading and signaled them to stand back.

"The eaglets need only watch as the Eagle catches their prey," he said as he moved into the enemy units.

He flowed like a leaf between the units, never attacking them. Each unit that attacked him missed and ended up hitting its comrades. As more and more Corvan FMEs were caught in crossfire, they backed away from Ben to get a better shot at him, surrounding him in a circle. Ben closed his eyes as they fired at him, making no effort to dodge. None of the bullets hit him, and each Corvan soldier hit one of their comrades. They collapsed to the ground, leaving Ben standing alone. The platoon Ben led looked at him with awe; they had never seen anything like that. They wondered if Ben possessed some sort of supernatural power.

"The earth is my channel," Ben said, "you can destroy *me* no more than you can destroy *it*."

As Ben flowed through the enemy units, Bors inspired his assigned platoon. His energy was electric, and he acted like a superhero, posing whenever he finished a move. The men he worked with flowed with his attacks, making their platoon move in one fluid motion.

As Bors attacked the units, he thrust his hands into the air, shouting, "Hyper Sword, activate!"

Two phase swords rocketed from his wrist, combining to form one long phase sword. It was different from the average phase sword, working as a plasma rifle and a normal phase sword. Bors attacked with impunity,

taking down the Corvan FMEs with ease. He used his foot rockets to flip over a soldier, stabbing him from behind, then slashed another in half, before he finished by shooting a plasma beam out of his sword through a Corvan. The soldiers stared at him as he fought. Though it looked ridiculous, they stood no chance against the fury of his blows.

Jaygo tore through the Corvan units, Ti filling his body. He felt a new power come over him. It was a clear, focusing power. It differed from the hate-filled rage that had previously guided him in battle. He had something to protect now, *someone* to protect. His body pulsed with electricity. He moved through the enemies in a violent dance, taking them down before they even had a chance to react.

He pushed forward with his rockets into a group of forty soldiers who shot at him in a chaotic spread. He bobbed, weaved, and flipped through their fire, destroying each soldier with a single strike. More and more Corvans focused on him. They ignored the others, just like he wanted. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Roso, Jaled, and Seth nod at him. As long as he kept the Corvans distracted, the others would be able to do some real damage. The same was true for Sykes's company as well.

They were so focused on him that they didn't have time to shoot anyone else. He shredded through FME after FME like a towering dragon.

Jaygo shook his head. It wasn't enough. He had to do more. He had to get them *all* focused on him.

Sparks flew from his hands as he clapped them together. He placed one hand on the ground.

"Jishin," he said as the ground rumbled.

The street around him burst into red flames, shattering the windows of the nearby buildings in a large shockwave.

Jaygo stood in a small crater, dead enemies strewn across the street. He had taken a hundred or so out with that blast. Some Corvans lowered their guns and backed away from him. The others screamed at him in agony. Those left standing collected themselves and attacked him with everything they had, grenades, rifle shots, shotgun blasts, EMPs, and everything else.

Jaygo smirked. He could track it all. He threw or kicked back every grenade sent at him. He dodged the bullets and protected himself

against the shotgun blasts with his Ti armor. They couldn't touch him.

With the roar of a dragon, he fought through their ranks, his fists his only weapon. His aura grew brighter and brighter as he punched through the Corvans. The air grew so heavy that there was a physical weight and pressure around him.

He moved as quickly as lightning, never looking back after he struck. Their bodies and FMEs fell apart in his hands. The units piled up on the ground around him, and the Corvans thinned.

Jaygo looked down as he heard a crunch on the ground. There was nowhere to step. He couldn't leave it like that; he'd trip over the dead bodies and suits. He clapped his hands again, taking a short deep breath through his nose. He pushed his hands out wide from his body. A shockwave pulsed out from him, pushing the corpses into the air. Only the cracked concrete of the street remained. The dead bodies rained down around him, some implanting into buildings, others onto the sides of the street.

He looked at the remaining Corvans' stunned expressions as their fallen comrades rained down out of the sky. Jaygo heard a howl behind him, where a Corvan charged.

Jaygo dodged the man's phase sword thrust and crushed the man's spine with a blow to the back. More and more Corvan soldiers surrounded him with phase swords. Jaygo nodded. Ranged weapons had failed, melee was their only option.

He crushed their hopes as he moved in a fluid and elegant dance, moving so fast that to him, it seemed that his enemies weren't moving at all.

"Odori No Ryu," he said as he moved in a red blur. He caught their swords and broke them in his hands. Before ten seconds passed, the last unit around him fell.

The surviving Corvans who hadn't charged at him dropped their weapons to the ground.

Jaygo shot a small pellet from his wrist into the air above him, releasing an EMP that Mishti had developed. The pellet burst, and arcs of electricity shot out at the soldiers surrounding him, leaving his FME unaffected. The Corvans fell to the ground, immobilized.

He sighed as he looked around. There were so many bodies. But

his fight wasn't done yet. He flew down another street. They were relying on him. He had to protect them. He had to protect Tyrn.

The Company cheered their successes in the comms. His resolve strengthened as he heard them. They were doing it. They were pushing the Corvans back. Five to one, and they were winning.

The Corvans' numbers dropped from four to one, then three to one, then two to one. Jaygo flew above the battlefield as it thinned out. He had to find the commanding officer. He could stop it all if he could find them.

As he crossed into a blood-filled street, he spotted the officer who was in charge. His FME was different from the others. It was animal themed. The officer wore a gray pelt on his shoulders, and his FME was white. He looked like a coyote. Jaygo watched as the coyote crushed one of Sykes's soldiers with his bare hand, stabbed him with a knife, and threw him to the ground.

Jaygo shook his head as he saw green mist surround the coyote. He was using Ti.

"Jaygo Yen Kale," the coyote said as he dropped into a stance, where his hands swirled with emerald flames, "I was hoping our paths would cross."

"Your attack has failed," Jaygo said, "Surrender now, and I'll let you live."

"A Beast does not surrender!" The man said as he charged at Jaygo, throwing his knives at him.

Jaygo blocked the knives and flew into the air. The man chased after him in a green swirl. It looked just like Lynn's Ti.

The man struck out at him, but Jaygo predicted it and caught the blow mid-air. The force of their collision caused the glass in the buildings around them to shatter.

Jaygo narrowed his eyes. That wasn't a basic Ti-filled punch. This man was adept, just like the imposter had been.

Jaygo tossed the coyote around before throwing him to the ground. Right before he hit, the coyote shrouded his feet in emerald flames. As he touched the street, an emerald ring of fire spread out from his feet, and he rocketed back toward Jaygo.

The man was stronger than Jaygo expected. Jaygo's throw should

have killed him. There was no doubt in Jaygo's mind. The coyote had been trained by Lynn too.

He must know where Lynn is hiding, Jaygo thought.

They clashed in midair, moving at almost supersonic speeds, throwing punches and kicks at each other. Jaygo blocked every attack the Corvan officer threw at him, responding only with the weakest of his attacks, testing him to see what he knew, what Lynn had taught.

"Where is he?" Jaygo demanded.

Jin Sykes looked around at the soldiers. The fighting had stopped. He couldn't believe it. His soldiers outnumbered the Corvans now. Had the Leviathan Company really made that much difference? A shock wave nearly knocked him to the ground. He looked to the source, and his mouth opened wide.

Jaygo was fighting mid-air, faster than he could track. The Corvan officer he fought moved just as fast. Their blows were like lightning strikes. It was incredible.

He blinked before looking back down at his battalion.

"Now's our chance!" he said, "Let's end this fight."

His men nodded and pointed their guns at the defeated Corvans. The battle was all but won.

Koyot Sery, the officer fighting Jaygo, tried to catch his breath. His lungs were burning, his head fuzzy. He flew back in desperation as Kale chased him. His FME had been pushed to the limit. It wouldn't take much more abuse from the Leviathan Captain.

He had only one option left. His trump card. If this didn't kill the skrall, then nothing would.

The emerald flames around his body concentrated around his right fist.

He thrust his hand forward at Jaygo, an emerald Coyote shooting out of his hand, "Kyokan Ken!"

In his wildest dreams, Jaygo didn't think the officer could produce such an attack. Moving only by instinct, Jaygo dodged the man's attack and struck out with a Ti-laced punch. Jaygo felt the man's ribs break and

warm blood coat Jaygo's armored hand. Jaygo looked up at the soldier in shock. Jaygo heard a cough that sprayed the inside of the man's helmet. The coyote was dying.

"No," Jaygo whispered.

The man clung to him as they hovered in the middle of the air.

"Don't die!" Jaygo shouted, "Tell me who you are! Tell me where Lynn is!"

The Corvan officer laughed. His voice was so weak. Jaygo felt his heart clench.

"You may have taken my life," the man said, "but you haven't taken my pride. I refuse. The Beast Clan does not surrender."

There was that word again. Beast. What were they? Specialists? This man and the impostor had both used the term. He needed more answers. He needed to find Lynn.

He shook the Corvan soldier, "You have to tell me! Tell me where Lynn is! I know he trained you!"

The officer reached up, struggling to remove his helmet. It fell soundlessly to the ground. Jaygo looked at his face. He was older than Jaygo expected. He may have been Jaled's age. There was blood on his face, from where he coughed it up.

"I know who you are," the man said, his voice no louder than a whisper, "You may have won this battle, but the Emerald Tiger will always win."

Jaygo felt a chill go down his spine.

"I'll see you in Hell, Jaygo Yen Kale," the man said, smiling at Jaygo.

Jaygo watched as the light in the man's eyes died. His body went limp. He was dead, his smile frozen on his face. Jaygo dropped to the ground and laid the man down on the street. He looked at the battlefield.

His hands started shaking. Corvan and Iratian alike littered the broken street. He couldn't tell where the rainwater began and the blood ended. It was a nightmare.

"Who's still left?" Jaygo asked through his comms.

"We're all still alive," Ilel said, "We really showed them tonight."

"What about you, Major?" Jaygo asked.

"I'll live," Jin said, his voice pained, "just a few scrapes and

bruises.”

“How many?” Jaygo asked, his voice hoarse, “how many...”

“I’ve lost connection to 148 soldiers,” Jin said, “A miracle, considering what we were fighting against. There have been about a thousand civilian casualties in this area, though.”

“So many,” Jaygo said, kneeling on the wet street. He shook his head, “I’m sorry. I should have been here sooner.”

“We’re still alive,” Jin said, “And I didn’t think that was going to happen. My soldiers who died did so with honor. We all knew what we were getting into tonight. Without you, I would have lost the battalion.”

Jaygo stood up. He felt like he could have done more. He could have fought harder, been faster. He felt like he should have been stronger.

A hand touched his shoulder. He looked to see Tyrn, who had taken her helmet off.

She looked at him in concern, “We won, Jaygo.”

Jaygo looked at the dead around him. He knew that a few miles away, the battle raged on. He may have fulfilled his objective, but he could do more. He was going to put a stop to it. He was going to end it all.

Jaygo clenched his fists, “No, this battle isn’t over yet.”

He switched his comms, “Colonel Hughes, we’ve secured location B. Do you need any assistance?”

“That was fast,” Roy said, “It’s only been twenty minutes.”

“I can help however you need,” Jaygo said.

He heard Roy sigh, “It’s not going well. Our soldiers are barely holding off the Corvans. We’ve lost four hundred soldiers and maybe five times as many civilians.”

Jaygo gritted his teeth. This was his chance. He could help. He could make a difference.

“Leviathan Company,” he said, “I’m pinging my location now. We need to help the others.”

As the Company gathered around him, he noted how tired they looked. They had been fighting hard, not to mention their sleep deprivation. But they were still standing with him. Right to the end.

“It’s time to go,” he said, looking at them.

“Are you sure we’ll be alright?” Tyrn asked, “I know the odds are

better this time, but they'll see us coming."

"Don't worry," Jaygo said, taking off, "This fight was over before it began."

Enemy fire ripped past them in the air. The closer they got to the west side of the city, the worse it became. They flew high into the sky, above the high rises, dodging the fire. Anti-aircraft weapons started targeting them out of the sky.

"Fly low," he commanded, trying to avoid the mortars, "We're almost there."

They careened onto the battlefield, upheaving the Corvan soldiers around them. Shado carved a spot for them to land with her twin phase swords. They formed a circle around themselves as they landed, back to back with each other.

Jaygo looked beyond where they stood and saw all their fallen compatriots near a group of struggling Imperial soldiers. They had bunkered down near a tower.

He saw one particular FME he recognized. It lay in tatters next to a broken body. He could recognize Glen's long, flowing red hair. Her lifeless eyes stared out into the sky. She had been one of his oldest friends. They had been neighbors as children. And now, she was gone.

He remembered when he, Glen, and Roy had been trapped in their neighborhood.

"We've got three days of supplies left," Glen said, "We're going to have to face them sometime."

Jaygo looked down at his hands. He hadn't felt Ti since he had collapsed on that rooftop. He felt so weak, so powerless. What good was all his training if it couldn't help him now?

"Backup should be coming," Roy Hughes said.. None of them had FMEs. They were completely outmatched.

Glen gritted her teeth, "I can't wait that long. People are dying out there, every day!"

She looked at Jaygo, and their eyes locked. Both of them were the only surviving members of their families.

Jaygo knew what he had to do but didn't know if he could do it. He didn't know if he was strong enough.

"I'll go," Jaygo said, walking to the front of the house, "I'll stop

all of them."

"Jaygo," Roy protested, "That's suicide. Please, just wait for backup."

Jaygo shook his head and looked back at Roy, whose face was marred with fear and worry. Just as Jaygo's father had been.

"I've held back long enough," Jaygo growled, tapping deep into the recesses of his soul, trying to gather Ti.

Jaygo could only see his father's face staring at him that night nearly five years ago. He remembered holding his dead brother. He remembered Lynn's smile. That terrible smile. And that haunting laugh.

He didn't know what came over him. He charged away from the Company, screaming. He attacked, numb to everything else. It was all meaningless. This war. All the killing. Everything.

Jaygo didn't care whether he lived or died. All he saw was Lynn's face laughing at him.

He unsheathed his phase sword and slashed through the units, not knowing what he was doing. The Corvans tore like tissue paper. Every slice, every slash, was directed at Lynn, at the pain he had caused.

He didn't know how long he fought. He didn't know how long he cut. When he finally sliced empty air, Jaygo got a hold of himself. Lynn's face left his mind as quickly as it had come. He sheathed his bloody sword. He looked back at the damage he had caused and dropped to his knees. Had he done all that?

Several thousand Corvan units lay dead in the streets near him. His Company waited a few hundred meters away.

They just looked at him. They hadn't seen him like this before. He had taken out over two thousand men in minutes.

Tyrn approached Jaygo, holding her hand out to him.

She put her hand on his shoulder, "Jaygo, are you okay?"

He looked up at her. What could he say? How could he convey the pain, the loss, the death?

He stood up and took her hand, "I'm fine. How is everyone?"

"We're good, Captain," Seth replied, "These Corvan scum are just flies to us."

Jaygo nodded, letting go of Tyrn's hand. He would have more time later to process what happened. The fight was still going on.

“I’m going to end this,” he said, looking at the tower where his allies were struggling. They needed his help.

“There are still over two thousand Corvan units left; what are you going to do?” Jaled scoffed, “Are you going to kill them like you did these men?” He shook his head, “We saw you, Jaygo; what you did. It was like you weren’t human. Take it from me; no one’s soul comes through that unscathed. You’ve done enough, son.”

“No,” Jaygo said, looking back as he shook his head, “Not yet.”

He could sense Tyrn’s worry for him, her fright, “Don’t worry,” he told them, “I have more than one way of stopping this.”

Jaygo concentrated and stepped forward, a large crack and a soft boom following him, and he propelled himself toward the enemy. He could no longer hear, and he could barely see. But that didn’t matter; he knew what he had to do. He cut off the Corvan soldiers from the Iratian soldiers. Soon, most were grouped in a large circle away from the Iratians in a large field near the broken-down communications building.

Jaygo stopped and took a step back. He took a deep breath and clapped his hands together. Arcs of electricity surrounded the Axial. He pulled his right hand back. His hand glowed blue. The pressure around him increased again. The sky seemed to darken. Small debris jumped off the ground into the air. He could feel the power flow through his body, threatening to destroy him. It was a torrent, penetrating every crevice of his being, every pore, every cell. His body vibrated violently.

He thrust his hand forward, and tried to shout, “Hikari no Ryu Ken!”

A giant, burning blue dragon erupted from his hands, spanning hundreds of meters. It crackled and sizzled with energy, roaring loudly. The Corvan units were turned to dust as the dragon enveloped them. The ground cracked and groaned; large parts of the land flew up and disintegrated. Jaygo struggled to keep control over it. The dragon distorted.

He had to hold on a little longer; it wasn’t done yet. The power flowed out of his body, draining him of all his strength. The dragon deformed more, until it became an oval of pure energy. He could no longer control it. As Jaygo let go, it exploded.

A giant fireball engulfed the area, licking up the grass, corpses,

and the entirety of the communications building. The shock wave that followed pushed everyone back. A giant mushroom cloud sprouted overhead, and blue, billowing smoke covered the city. As the smoke cleared, Jaygo remained standing. The Corvan army was decimated. Only a handful that had been engaged with Iranian units remained standing. They quickly dropped their weapons.

Jaygo lowered his hand and struggled to catch his breath. Sweat furrowed his brow, and his arm was numb. He had done it. The Corvan stood no chance of winning now.

He looked above, where the carriers floated. He had to stop them from firing down on the city.

Just as he was about to take off, explosions littered the sky. The carriers were being bombarded.

From the east, a dozen airships fired giant plasma bolts at the Corvan carriers, sending shrapnel down into the city below.

A voice broke through his comms, “Thanks for the assist, Captain. I’ll take it from here.”

“General Tomath?” Jaygo said, “What took you so long?”

“Getting these airborne is no easy task.” the General responded.

The Corvan carriers turned and flee. Large black trails of smoke followed after them.

Jaygo nodded. The General was forcing them out of the city. It looked like the battle was finally over.

He collapsed onto his knees and sighed. They had prevented the destruction of most of Atoli.

The Company ran to him, lifting him up on their shoulders. The Iranian soldiers started cheering. Jaygo knew they never dreamed of actually winning.

Jaygo frowned and looked around. Many fires were still being put out around the city. The west side districts had been hit hard. He saw many civilians bruised and bloodied at the edges of the newly created wasteland.

Many lives were lost in the battle at location A; over half of the soldiers and countless civilians.

“Good job,” General Tomath complimented Jaygo through the comms after the last carrier had been driven out, “you saved everyone here today.”

Jaygo grinned, exhausted. That last move had taken a lot out of him. He didn't mind the Company carrying him. He looked up at the night sky. He thought he saw something shining in the clouds but decided it must have just been his imagination. He had won, and no one from his Company had died. That's all that mattered.

Lynn Forsigth hovered in the air over the battlefield. He kept his FME, Bastion, in stealth mode. He did not want to be seen quite yet. He just wanted to see Jaygo's power. The crater that Jaygo had left was massive. Smoke still rose from when he had fired the blue dragon. Bodies of all kinds littered the ground. He grinned, but only surface deep.

His Father had been right; his men couldn't handle the stress of using Ti and fighting afterward. Jaygo took them out without any issue. He'd become quite a bit stronger since their last fight. He might finally be ready to fulfill his goal. He couldn't wait to see what Jaygo had in store for him.

Lynn took off into the night sky, leaving Irati and Jaygo behind him. The time would soon come that they would fight again. He looked forward to it.